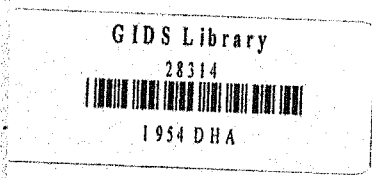


100

# Nation, Community, Caste and the Problems of Subaltern History Writing

Hiranmay Dhar



1

954

DHA

INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Sector O, Aliganj Housing Scheme  
LUCKNOW-226 024

September 1998

Working Paper No. 147

NATION, COMMUNITY, CASTE AND THE  
PROBLEMS OF SUBALTERN HISTORY  
WRITING



Hiranmay Dhar

GIRI INSTITUTE OF DEV DEVELOPMENT STUDIES  
Sector 'O', Aliganj Housing Scheme, Lucknow - 226 024

September 1998

## PREFACE

This paper has grown out of the Subaltern Studies Conference held in Lucknow in January 1998.

Since the publication of its first volume in 1982, the Subaltern Studies scholars have created a space for themselves in the social science research in India and outside India. They have drawn both accolade and criticism. Over these decades and half, they have grown and have also changed their scope and methodology. One of the purpose of the Lucknow Conference was to look into various aspects of these changes and engage them. This paper is an attempt to continue with that effort.

The author is solely responsible for his understanding of the selected papers and forms of their presentation. Suggestions for improvement will be gratefully accepted.

Usual absolution of others from mistakes in the paper is of course there.

**NATION, COMMUNITY, CASTE AND THE  
PROBLEMS OF SUBALTERN HISTORY  
WRITING**

Dr Hiranmay Dhar\*

Sixth Subaltern Studies Conference was held at the Giri Institute of Development Studies at Lucknow this year. Under the rubric 'Fractured Societies, Fractured Histories', the Conference discussed political institutions, nationalism, community, caste and women questions.

In his inaugural, Gyan Pandey pointed out that the Subaltern Studies (SS) has emerged as powerful critique of the orthodox concept of nationalism and also of the partisan way of writing history. It has also initiated serious thinking about what these two concepts mean to the subordinated social groups who do not write history and who do not leave behind records of their own as their privileged counter part. In recent times, the SS have been shifting, GP said, from the critique of the dominant notion of nationalism, history writing etc, to the critique of History itself i.e, to the critique of the way in which we negotiate our past and how we appropriate it for our political purposes.

In his more detailed account of the evolution of SS studies, Partha Chatterjee located the current debate in

---

\*Professor, Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow



histriography and in Social Science in the divergence between the "pure" theory of transition formulated out of the Western European experience and the specific instances of transition in social formations found in Asia, Africa and Latin America with their uneven pace and rythm of development of various instances, resulting in the creation of uneven contradictions in these social formations. Pointing out that the elite/subaltern formulation can provide useful guidelines for more appropriate theoretical formulations that can better explain these transitional societies, Chatterjee explained that the elite/subaltern relation is not an alternative definition to class. It is its complementary which can better explain its uneven development. Neither this relation is synonyms for the ruling class and the governed class, for this relation does not corresponds to the structure of the state power.

The elite/subaltern should be viewed as two opposed, dialectical consciousness, Chatterjee argued. The subaltern is at the sometime dependent (subordination) and opposed (autonomy) to the elite consciousness. On the basis of this approach, he said, the SS initially concentrated on two aspects of modern histriography: (a) the split between political domain of subaltern and elite and (b) the autonomy of peasant consciousness.

Publication of the first three volumes drew sharp reactions from different quarters. Criticism among the SS as

also those of their critiques, Chatterjee argued, initiated new turn in the enquiry from forms of subaltern autonomy to their process of representation. One methodological shift in their enquiry was the study of text which enabled them to critically examine every political projects and activity that is connected with, or part, of the established regime. He, however, cautioned that the agenda of the SS is the oppositional and critical history-writing. The subaltern cannot speak for the entire society. The historiography of subaltern, therefore, would always remain fragmentary, partial and even incoherent.

This new turn in their enquiry has enabled the SS to engage in the current political debate on community, caste and the gender question in the country. Through their research, Chatterjee said, the SS had tried to show that both Hindu chauvinists and the secularists are persuading two different strategies to consolidate the regime of modern state. On the caste relation the SS thinking is that the caste conflict are now almost entirely centered on the relative position of different caste groups in relation to the state. While all women are subaltern in a patriarchal society, it is necessary, the SS thinks, to identify how the social construction of gender in such a society is made more complex through the intervention of caste, class and communal identities.

In his paper "On Retailing of the Muslim Conquest of India", Shahid Amin has argued that the question of conquest,

memory, nation building and the right to citizenship have come together in India in recent times. In this context there has been criticism of the historian's view of history : it is incapable as historical practice to grapple with the issues of memory. For the historians, he says, the real challenge under this situation is not to keep on producing really sturdy secular history based on facts and then use it against what people are imagining. The historian's history at the current juncture should also be a history of memory, i.e., people's construction of the past.

Shahid Amin argued further the response to this should also not be in terms of the argument that India has been defined by syncreticism. Syncreticism, he said, should be understood as a process and this process has very often been a process of conquest. i.e., there is a relation between syncreticism and conquest. Turkish conquest of India has so far been written either in terms of syncreticism or in terms of bloodshed. Now is the necessity, he pleads, to open a third front in such history writing and write a non-sectarian history.

Citing the example of the ballads of Gazi Mian sung by the daffalis of Behraich, Shahid Amin argues that the local people - normally pastoralists and local low castes hindus - do not talk of Mohammed of Gazni, but of his nephew Gazi Miyan, a saint warrior, who died on the day of his marriage at the age of 19 while protecting his sepherd subjects from the maurading Nepali king Suhaldeo. Shahid Amin argues that

the maurading Nepali king Suhaldeo. Shahid Amin argues that in this story there is actually a collapse of two categories - conquest and saint. No one talk about the Northern Indian popular culture without talking about stories like Gazi Mian.

Within the domain of history writing then, he said, we must try and understand how is it that the Muslim conquest is retailed in this case in such a way that it leads to granting of ascent to the stories of Gazi Mian across the religious divide. The martyrdom of Gazi Mian does not lead to conversion, but to the creation of the followers. What we have therefore in this story is not conquest, but "just" conquest.

One should try to understand the cult of Gazi Mian, Shahid Amin said, in terms of understanding of the every day difference. Gazi Mian is not a pacifist. He is the conquerer and yet his achievement is not in terms of conversion, but in terms of those who are not converted. Both sides have not given up their position and that is what is required in telling history i.e., in terms of differences.

In their "Vasudhaiva Kutubakam : the Hindu in the World", Gyan Prakash (speaking for their group Vasudha) talked about the connection between globalising of Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP henceforth) and globalisation as such. At a more fundamental level, he also talked about connection between ideological apparatus (i.e., internet) and electronic capitalism in a world without non-alignment.

Electronic capitalism (marked by tremendous compression of time and space in capitalist system of production) at the same time creates a class of professional class - termed post-state class system - who has the capacity to communicate with each other globally and can secede with the rest of the society.

Gyan Prakash argued that it is in this context of this post-state class system, that one has to see the BHP activities among the Indian diaspora in the US. This Indian diaspora in US is too dispersed and their religious practices are too home-oriented for the emergence of tightly-knit, well controlled and institutionalised Hindu Society. It is in this situation that the BHP has stepped in and is attempting to reconstitute the dispersed Indian immigrants into a cohesive Hindu community by the use of official multi-culturalisation policy in U.S. and telecommunication revolution. To this effect the academic infrastructure in U.S., where the Indian diaspora is dominant, has provided most congenial environment for both multi-culturalism and computer network. In recent decades there has been tremendous proliferation of VHP organisations in these colleges and campuses in U.S.

The transnational capital has been constantly wrenching this new class of its mere identity politics. Through dissimulation of their recoded concept of ethnic identity, communalism, family values (e.g., patriarchal control over women) the BHP and its organisation in US have been trying to

reconstitute these Indian immigrants into a cohesive Hindu community, on the one hand, and on the other, to channelise millions of dollar raised in the US to the development/welfare sectors in India. Obviously there is seepage of this fund to Sangh Parivar Organisations in India. With these resources the Sangh Parivar can develop a new political agency: the post state class system which will not be under the domination of any nation state.

The Left in India, GP argued, has failed to comprehend this Hind Nationalism's bid for strong role in the new global order through recoding their phylosophy. The Left in the US, has also failed to realise the importance of the electronic revolution which at once allow the penetration of international capital and also the creation of a Hindu who can step into the "International Civil Society" at ease.

Discussion at the end of this paper was focussed on three basic concepts : Electronic capitalism, post-state class system and financialisation of globe. Electronic capitalism, GP explained, refers to compression of time and space in the capitalist system of production. Telecommunication revolution, he said, has made possible worldwide dispersal of units of production on the one hand, and, on the other, tremendous centralisation of decisiain making process which can then be dessiminated to any part of the world virtually at the flick of a switch. The term post-state class system does not refer to the withering away of the



state and class relations. It signifies, on the other hand, an effort by the capital to organise the economy without the constraints of the nation state.

Financialisation of globe, GP argues in response to questions, refers to a recent tendencies in the relationship between global capital and the nation states - a new kinds of contradictions between the international capital and the nation states. It is not that the international capital will automatically produce a nation state which will be completely surrogate to it, but that this capital shows a tendency which is attempting to create a political situation which does not remain confined to the dictat of the nation state. The global Hindutwa, GP asserts, is connected with this global capital. Breton Wood, GP argued in his further elaboration, was an attempt to organise global capital through the institution of nation state. But that state has receded to the background in the face of this global capital. On the question of globalisation of Hindutwa, he argued that their mode of functioning remains the same i.e., the search for roots and ethnic identity, as it was in its initial phase. But in its globalising phase the Hindutwa has connected itself to certain structural factors linked to the changes in the nature of the global capital.

In his "Fractured Society and Fractured History - Ayodhya Contribute the Most", the journalist, Jamil Akhtar, pointed out that the relation between Hindus and Muslims have changed significantly after the Ayodhya incident. In the

case of Ayodhya the interest of the judiciary at the state level was to maintain the status quo despite the Apex Court's contention that those who demolished Babri Masjid are criminals. On the otherhand, the Executive's approach, Akhtar said, was communal from the beginning of the Masjid controversy to its final demolition. The state legislature colluded in this act. The local press was completely partisan.

In their "Women and Environment Movement In Ghad Area", Ashok Choudhury (Vikalp group) analysed the role of women in the popular assertions for traditional forest rights in the Ghad area (the foot hills of Shivalik in Saharanpur and Haridwar districts) of U.P. The forest reservation policy of the Government of India - which is a continuation of the colonial policy only - deprived the locals (mostly backwards, Dalits and minoritties living by rope making) of their traditional rights and livelihood. From the early eighties the local people began opposing this official policy with the active participation of the women. The assertions of women was against their double exploitation, i.e., social exploitation of women as women and also economic exploitation of workers of which they constitute a sizeable segments.

In his "Religion Social Space and Identity : Construction of Boundary in Colonial India", Sanal Mohan (SM henseforth) discusses the movement of Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha and its prophet Yohannan in the cntext of lower



caste movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Kerala. SM analysed the movement in terms of contest over space which has taken different balance from material to spirituality rather than in terms of binary opposition between material well being and spirituality. SM interpreted the movement as an effort at recasting the social power structure of Travancore during the period as also as a site where the colonial modernity (e.g. education) got emphasized among the lower caste of Travancore.

During the movement the dalit consciousness came to be expressed through reworked religious idioms (e.g. 'Onam' came to stand for bright future for the dalit), traditions, collective memory, social experience, etc. Instead of problematising slavery as agrestic servitude (as in North India), the slavery, SM says, was treated by Johannan as not something to be erased from the public mind but as something which has to be reworked and dismantled. In conventious, meetings etc., the Sabhas circulated the bitter experiences of slave past in a manner that gave dalits better understanding of their slave past as well as motivated to break with that past. By using history and prophetic salvation, Yohannan (later turned prophet) reworked biblical concepts like apocalypse and then use them for restructuring the social power structure of Travancore which was enslaving the lower caste.

SM argued that Johannan also reworked the relationship between body and caste through mythical representation of

past social experience of slave. He declared, for example, that he has come to the earth to liberate dalits but within the skin of slaves. Yohannan's whole effort to restore dalit identity was, to SM's argument, a process of self-negation, i.e. an effort to become what it was not earlier. In this the Sabha's effort has been to break out of the caste fold which was the base of all past community and to introduce new concepts, like theorised concepts of slave. But the agenda remained incomplete. The caste affiliation persisted and came back later when the schism appeared in the movement.

Opening the discussion on Ashok Chakrabarty's paper, Sail Mayaran (SM henceforth) pointed out that the ethnicity of muslims have often been assumed in the such discourses, not problematised. This community too, she says, are differentiated. It also needs to be remembered in such discourses, she said, the relation between people and state vis-a-vis forest and that between women and forest are more complex than it assumed to be. Gautam Bhadra argued that the history writing cannot do without stereotype. In the process of history writing, the subaltern studies have unpacked the stereotype of elites and constructed the stereotypes of dalits. But the question here is what would be the method of stereotyping the dalit language. Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak argued that the construction of dalit consciousness by recalling the slave by SM is the construction of dalit consciousness through separation. Rabi Sinha points out that in this process of unpacking and

packing of stereotypes there lies the question who is packing and unpacking and the reference point from which that person was constructing and deconstructing. Suggesting a different strategy for reading a subaltern text, Shahid Amin says that for an outsider one of the way to read subaltern text would be to try and understand how precisely the stereotypes are being elided over or denied as one goes through that text.

On the process of inversion, Susie Tharu pointed out that we are always dependent on dominant mode for inversion. Every notion of inversion, Gyan Prakash said, carries within it the language of dominance in an inverted form. For dalits, he said, to claim from the language of dominance a status for themselves is deeply problematic as it strikes right at the centre of configuration of power. Ratan Khasnabai (supported by Prosenjit Biswas) asked whether SM has used the category of class in his analysis of Travancore society during late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In response to all these questions SM said that in all social science research the stereotypes plays important role and he would go for it to the extent it enables him to dismantle the structure of dominance. He was, however, not sure how an outsider could know in absolute terms the ways and means of a community that he studies. In his analysis of the movement, SM said, he has not used the category of class as it does not help him to understand the movement. In the late nineteenth century Travancore, he said, the condition of

agriultural labour was more akin to slaves than the wage labour.

Sukaipa Bhattacharya (SB henceforth) in her paper "Women and the question of cultural rights : Two cases from North-East India" dealt with the (non-insurgent) women in the north-east India who are thrice marginalised : as a post-colonial subject, as part of periphery to the (national) centre, and, finally, as women.

In the north-east India, SB argues, the state nation (inversion of nation state) is an imposition on a mosaic of fractured societies now positioned between patriliney-matriliney immediately after their slave past. In such a situation the women of Mizoram, through their organization, the Mizo Women Federation, have avoided direct confrontation with the patriarchy. Instead, they have taken up programmes like women welfare, child welfare, mediation between civil society and the state and has also started questioning the customary laws which treats women almost as domestic animal.

In this attempt the Mizo Women, SB argued, have also criticised the traditional elites, the Church, etc. which did not treat the women at par with men. In this assertions, the Mizo Women has sought solidarity with the mainstream feminism, while their men have sought solution of the north-east problem outside the framework of the Indian national set up, i.e. in insurgency.

In Nagaland, SB says, the Naga mothers and their organization have also deliberately kept themselves away from the direct overt confrontation. SB argued that they are carrying their roles as mother, resisting their sons from taking drugs, liquor, etc. and are also trying to ensure the eco-friendly environment. Theirs, SB says, is an attempt to create an area of hope articulated through a counter-ideology of non-violence and off-stage resistance ("Shed no blood" is their slogan) as also a struggle for reclaiming the lost position of Naga identity and Naga ethnicity.

In his "Debate between Patriliney and Matriliney in Khasi Society", Prasenjit Biswas (henceforth PB) has argued that the matriliney system in the Khasi society is now being contested by the patriarchal discourses which are drawing its sustenance from the Indian state nation. The articulation of capitalist market economy (private property relations) with the domestic system of production (communitarian control of resources) has created hierarchical structure of economy in the region. It has created a class of Khasi affluents, who are arguing that the traditional system, values, etc. are inimical to growth and development. The children should be given their father's name; the property ownership, the inheritance rights, etc. should go to the father. All these, PB says, are effort to undercut the symbolic authority of mother, break down clan/kinship relations and dehistoricise the Khasi society and disorient their ethnic identity.

The opposition of Khasi women organization to this, PB says, has been indirect (opposition to patriarchy through the opposition to the state nation), inarticulate (not directly counterpoised against patriarchy which is yet to be there in Khasi society) and partially conservative (defending essence of traditional culture). However these women organizations have repeatedly asserted that they are protecting the cultural traditions of Khasi society against the patriarchy as also the Indian state and not trying to essentialise their feminine position. It is the patriarchy, which is trying to essentialize them.

The subalternity of Khasi women, to PB's concern, veers between their symbolic authority within the matrilineal system and the supposed altered position that they are trying to take against the patriarchy. PB also argued that any attempt to record these discourses in alien languages would further dehistoricise the Khasi society. These discourses should be articulated in the native language.

Gautam Bhadra opened the discussion by the comment that the slogan "shed no more blood" in SB's paper sends ambiguous and hierarchical messages : one to the Indian state and the other to the emergent state of insurgency. He asked whether these two roles of women clash and overlap. Similarly, he says, the word "caring" in her paper could mean (a) looking after, etc. and (b) taking responsibility (on behalf of insurgency). In clarification, SB said that GB's comment that the slogan is ambiguous help her to understand better



the women she was talking about. Unlike the insurgent women, these women are unorganised, without memory and language. Their opposition have always been indirect, off-stage, etc., their ambiguity helps them in their opposition. PB pointed out the term 'care' in his paper means concrete care (e.g. care for forest, etc.), which can come from any sources.

On the concept 'the state-nation' used by him and SB, PB pointed out that it refers to an institutions/norms which is impositions from above to which the community from below made to adjust. These institutions have no ideological moral, etc. foundation within the community concerned. Logically they derive their foundation from the domain of power. In the North-East the democratic set-up, PB said, has been imposed from the top. The people have been asked to vote; an elite has grown; a selective promotion of dalit has taken place. But there has hardly been any democratisation process from within the North-East societies themselves.

Mahmood Mamdani informed that the word 'state-nation' has frequently appeared in the discourses on state formation in Africa in recent times. In Africa, he argued, there has been complete disjunction between the processes of state formation and social processes. The colonial state denied the existence of any nation and the independent post-colonial state puts at the centre stage a nation-building project which was co-terminus with its own boundary and denies legitimacy to any history and, therefore, to any identity.

arising in the periods preceeding 1885. The concept of state-nation in Africa, MM argues, is seen as an agent that enforces a manufactured identity which is enforced from above.

PB, however, argued that the concept of state-nation used by him is different from MM's concept of state-nation. In the North-Eastern context it inheres the concept of nation from below. This is how the north-eastern communities have tried to represent themselves - as nation from below - in the UN forum on Unrepresented Nation. Javed Alam, however, found in this concept 'nation from below' an expression of demand for recognition as distinct people within a larger multi-national situation by these little communities. At this stage, PB argued for the writing of the history of natives in the way the natives do, i.e. the nativisation of history without which, he says, there will be theorisation about their history, not their history writings.

Discussion during this period was mainly focussed on the question of retrieval of subaltern voices. In the discussion a distinction was also drawn between subaltern women and the women as subaltern. Shahid Amin argued that one cannot retrieve a subaltern text and leave it at that as it does not help us understand the document. The problem here to inhabit that document with the time and space and the difference from those of the historians' to make the text meaningful. The historians should also remember, he added, that the official documents (unlike memory) is reflection of the relationship



28314

between the state and the people. The way the evidence is available reflects the way the state has impinged on the life and livings of the subaltern.

Reacting to comments on her paper, Sukalpa recalled Gautam Bhadra's intervention that one needs some basis of an interaction, or exchange, with the subaltern groups (some stereotype) to make an entry into their otherness. "What does one do?" - she asked when a woman like her wants to study the emergence of the Naga Woman from an unorganised, rural Naga Women. Reacting to this Spivek pointed out that she agrees with Sukalpa's (as also Bhadra's) argument about the necessity of stereotypes in dealing with unorganised Naga women. The question here is, she says, how does one proceed in such a situation where one is not in a position to enter into the space (of unorganised Naga women) and which has therefore been defined as women without language, history, etc. One of the ways to resolve this question is, she thinks, through the textuality of doing (without, of course, valorising doing over knowing) in that arena with patience and over long time. Citing her experience of interaction with women peasants of Manbhum district (West Bengal), Spivak pointed out the difference in their use of the word 'weaving' (associated with singing, sowing, etc.) and our use (associated with textile) of the word. She said that we have to enter that textuality with patience and learn the limit of our ignorance which tells that the other (person/woman) has no language.

Prasenjit Biswas expressed his doubt whether it is possible to ensure condition under which these events are taking place (and language created) while textualising these instances. In effect, he says, this effort produces a vast arsenal of self-constructed artifact. He, instead, advocated the field-linguistic method in which the investigator talks directly to the other in the field. In this effort, PB said, the researcher experiences some kind of dissolution of 'I' and 'thou' and this moment of dissolution, he said, is the moment of reviving of language which is to be recorded as history. One discussant, Janki, said that the assumption that the so-called native once identified will talk to you in an unmediated form is rather grand arrogation. It, in effect, locate the investigator at the centre of the narrative and has the potentiality of reconstruction - not retrieval- of the narrative of the other people by the investigator. Taking an ethnographical stance, she said, it might be more useful to construct the whole narrative as relation.

Reacting to this, Biswas pointed out that to his understanding, in the field-linguistic method, the moment the speech of the native is written down the writer is deferred into the speech of the native and also the native is deferred into the skill of writings. It is in this kind of play one is located the moment one goes to the native and this is how the field linguistic method claims its authenticity. Gayatri Spivak, however, disagreed arguing

that there is a problem in assuming that one can go to the native and hear him/her speaking. One practical approach in this connection could be, she said, to ask the question 'who is going to read what you are writing?' At this point Shahid Amin pointed out even when the researcher knows the language of the speech community he is investigating, there is the possibilities that the distance between his (the researcher) and the community surface precisely when he (the researcher) claims that he is nearer to that speech because of the knowledge of its language. This kind of affirmity (the knowledge of language), he warns, is enabling. But the researchers should be aware of the fact that there is something else besides (this enabling) and his writings must have space for this understanding.

Susie Tharu pointed out, somewhat differently, that the historian is not only a recorder but also a political activists even when he is making an intervention in the relation between the past and the present. A good history writing is judged, she said, by the politics of today in relation to the people as well as to the constituents it is addressing. Who reads the history is, therefore, an important question, she said.

Striking somewhat discordant note, Ravi Sinha pointed out that the view points expressed in these discussions are mainly the view points of language. He further added that in these discussions he finds tendencies to question or rather,

subvert the mainstream history writings. But he asked whether the plan is only to subvert or to confrontant also. If there is any plan to confront, he added, then there has to be an alternative plan outline, commitment, politics and reference points or coordinates. By reference point he meant, for example, when a dalit historian writes history his reference point is his community, which he termed as coordinates. His question was whether there is any truth in social science which is coordinate free.

In his paper "Subjective Paradigm on Hindi-Muslim Identities of Slum Dwellers in Calcutta", Dr. Chatterjee tried to show (a) interplay of socio-economic variables in the formation of structure of identity of Hindu and Muslims in the two riot prone suburbs of Metiabruz (in south west Calcutta) and Tangra (north-east Calcutta) within Calcutta; (b) limited role of economic parameters; and (c) effect of subjective variables in this identity formation and its changes over time and space. In the Metiabruz the people have been divided into two broad categories : elite and mass. The elite is comprised of economically powerful Bengali Muslims and also moneyed and politically active Bengali Hindus. The upwardly mobile materially are non-Bengali Hindus and Muslims. The later constitute growing counterforce which creates social tensions in the area. The Tangra region is inhabited by mixed population of urban poor. Chatterjee's argument was that in Metiabruz the socio-political variable was dominant factor in communal relation

and in Tangra it was economic. In both these instances, Chatterjee argues, these elements show signs of changes over time and, further, likely to remain constant sources of communal tension.

Sail Mayaram's concern in her "Canonizing Hinduism : the Politics of VHP Conversion" is to highlight : (a) the VHP's interpretation of Hinduism, and (b) its recasting of extant tradition. Her observations were based on the study of backward caste Hindu Rawat and Muslim Merat in the central Aravallis. Both these two communities are progeny of Mer (also spelt Mair) who habited the princely states of Harwar, Mewar and Ajmer of Western India.

With the help of their local accomplice, Chauhan Sabha, the VHP is introducing rituals centered on Sudhi Yagya etc., which gives prominence to Brahmins and marginalises lower castes priests. Its preachings of untouchability, she says, remain notional. Under VHP's guidance, the philosophy of karma with its emphasis on jati hierarchy is displacing the locally held beliefs of life and death. The local shrines (called Jhunjhar) are scattered around the field, have complex relations with agricultural fertility, provides space for women participation (e.g. 'ratiyaga', the night awake by females) and usually organised by lower caste priests. All these are being replaced by ritual practices around mandir which is urban centred and Brahmin priest controlled. VHP is also indulging in architectural displacemnt. The open structure ancestral shrine Thaan, which brings deity nearer

to the people, is being replaced by mandir which distance deity from people. Along this has disappeared the local offering practices of Madira and Maan, alcohol and meat.

VHP is trying to deny divinity to certain deity and empowering certain others. The cult of Ram Dev, the local Dalit God, having followers across religious divide, is being compared with Vishnu Awtar, a Hindu God. But another popular deity, Tejaji, whose cult also spans religious divide, has been denigrated. The VHP is also trying to redefine the cult of Hinglaj, the goddess of Nathyogi, which is associated with Tantra and which has provided a major challenge to the caste and gender divide. The erotic Hinglaj cult is being transformed to the Parvati cult, the goddess of social propriety, especially sexuality regulated by marriage.

Gautam Bhadra opened the discussion with comments on media network and the state. (Reference to Gyan Prakash's paper on "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"). Arguing that this type of network technology as also the state existed historically everywhere everytime, Bhadra asked whether there has been any conceptual change in them in recent times. He also asked whether the concept of modernity expresses itself in terms of network etc. and in which way they are different from the past. Rajesh Mishra said that the cannonisation of Hinduism is a political project. In this project the VHP is making use of modern techniques, the state, etc. It cannot be contested effectively by individuals opening third front in history

writing (e.g. non-sectorian history writings by Shahid Amin). Only when these efforts, Mishra said, are related to certain coordinates (as suggested by Ravi Sinha) can they effectively counter these VHP activities.

Nicholas Dirk reacted by saying that the problems of history is to demarcate changes; the notion of modernisation is what happened in the past and what has changed. (Reference to earlier debate on history writing). In the modern anthropology, he said, the process of sanskritisation has been tried to be grasped as a completely self-generating autonomous process without any specific interference of the state or any outside agencies like VHP, etc. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century South India, Dirk argued, the process of sanskritisation was virtually legislated from the top because of conjunction between top-level administrative elites and their village-level counterpart. The outcome has been the process leading to strategic movement of certain classes, iconic changes, etc. which not only has posed problems for history writings and anthropological enquiries but also created the process of hinduism. Roop Rekha Verma added that the latest political agenda of VHP is to impose uniform identity on various social/religious groups and commercialise hinduism. She also said the police, and also army, are sympathetic to communal forces. Sanal Mohan said that in its urge for construction of new nation, the VHP is trying to appropriate certain aspects of agenda of national discourses and national



movements. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala, he said, there are instances when upper caste religious practices (also their gods and goddesses) have come down to the lower castes and the latter have stopped worshipping their own gods and defined this change as reform. Commenting on Chatterjee's paper Sanal Mohan pointed that Chatterjee has primarily dependent on economic criteria as determinant of identity in his paper. There are, he said, many constitutive elements in our daily life, which, if taken into account, can broaden and enrich our understanding of the problems of identity. In the same paper Gyan Pandey found different kinds of identities, e.g., non-Bengali Muslims who are called Behari Muslims; non-Bengali Hindus called non-Bengali Hindus. All these identities need, he said, more rigorous analysis.

\* Ratan Khasnabis argued that a strong wave of communalism is sweeping the subcontinent in recent times. The collapse of Soviet State system, he said, has created a space where communalism raised its heads everywhere. The ideology of class yielded place to communal ideas. Javed Alam reacted to this by saying that the problems of communalism cannot be understood by counterposing class against community. The use of community in a generalised sense has not enriched our understanding of the specific situation in India. In India, he added, the larger castes, referred to as Jati earlier, have collapsed into communities like Jadav, Kurmi, etc. These 'varna' like communities, according to Javed Alam, do



not accept Brahmenical categories, hierarchies and ritual discriminations.

Developing class and other differentials within, these communities are important site for understanding the VHP phenomenon and communalism. From out of these communities a new middle class has emerged which is trying to organise these communities in larger political groupings especially after Mandal episode and challenged the Brahminical authorities.. It has posed challenges to the particular way hinduism is looked at and was given a new meaning to it. This new middle class has decomposed the earlier middle class dominated by upper castes. This process of decomposition has taken a communal shape. The upper caste Brahmin, Thakurs, etc. has stopped thinking about themselves as Brahmin, Thakurs, etc. and taken to hinduism which has arraigned itself against the struggle for democracy by these newly emergent middle class.

In their political practices, the activists often confront a social situation which is neither anti-communal, nor secular or democratic. In this confrontation, Ravi Sinha said, the political activists can make use of the knowledge created by the social scientists. In their process of investigation into subaltern consciousness the social scientists must find out methods to incorporate their study of myths, mysticism, etc. with all other micro-movements which may not always be of subaltern groups. Only this kind of approach will enable one to find out strategies to fight

out communalism at a larger scale. To Sail Mayaram, he asked whether she is also looking into changes in the political attitudes of the community towards VHP, i.e. towards its political identity.

In her response to question, Sail Mayaram pointed out that there was a major shift in voting for VHP in her region of study. She further argued that the people are not usually a passive recipients of any ideology. While analysing the penetration of any ideology, one must look into the reciprocity aspects. She found local complicity among Merat and Rawat in the process of penetration of VHP ideology in the region. However, she said, the people also resisted. Even after 'Parivartan' the people (i.e. the Muslims) continued with their practices of burial. When there has been attempt to change the kinship structure, the people resisted openly. There have been instances of riots also. The form of resistance depended on the customs and practices of resistance of the locals. She added further that the modernity entered into the lives of these community in diverse way. The idea that the hindus and muslims are two distinct categories came during the colonial era. The democracy entered their way of life at the time of mobilisation in 1947. It is during this period that the idea of de-islamisation also came into being. It is in a large meeting of Rawat and Rajput under the leadership of Jodhpur Maharaja that the idea that Merat should gave up their corrupt practices was first articulated. At the end Sail

Mayaram commented on the effect of literacy campaign on the community marked by oral tradition and the absence of writing. It is important to enquire into the double influence of literacy and the writing on a basically non-literate culture. One thing that is happening definitely, she said, that these small relatively autonomous enclaves are ceasing to be autonomous.

Through an engaging critique of Saroj Pathak (a Gujarati intellectual of immediate post-independent period), Susie Tharu in her paper "Citizenship and its discontent" argued that the political movement that emerged in the 80's and 90's has thrown into disarray the liberal national concensuses like secularism, planned development, the status of law etc. This has created a new terrain which is not in commensurate with the terrain in which the Indian feminism emerged. The later is now being called upon to engage with such questions as caste, religious community, globalisation of capital etc. Susie Tharu suggests that in this new juncture Saroj Pathak's work has salience. Even in the 60's she was searching in her fictions ways and means to engage with these very issues.

Analysing the colonial state, Mahmood Mamdani (MM) argued that it produced two types of identity : civic and ethnic. The civic identity is the identity of citizens, it is racially defined. The civil rights are protected by civil laws and enforced by the central state. The state in Africa is conglomeration of local states, i.e. the district level

authorities also called native authorities. The natives are defined ethnically, excluded from the regime of rights, and follow their own ethnic groups, customs, which is codified as customary law enforced by customary authority. Unlike in India, in the African case these customary rights include the right to use land (though not its proprietorship), which is very important for the livelihood of the poor.

At independence, the distinction between the citizen and subjects turned into citizen and ethnic. The settlers belonged to civic citizenship, but the native belonged to both. There are two types of settlers. The first category of settlers are the foreigners, the non-native settlers like the Tootsee in Rawanda (who have come from elsewhere in Africa); the Asians, the Arabs, the whites, etc. Then there are native-settlers, who leave outside his ethnic area. They are also called foreign natives. In ethnic sense, the settlers are divided into indigenous and non-indigenous. It is in this demand for privileging the indigenous over the non-indigenous (often the majority if one adds settlers and non-settlers) the ethnic conflict in Africa is structurally embedded.

On the question of identity in Africa, MM said, there are two types of identities : cultural and political, institutional and non-institutional. In the context of Rawanda he said that the Hutu and Tootsees are the only two conflicting groups who have a history of inter-marriage and

had patriarchial system of lineage before the colonial period. Hutu - which meant lack of wealth - if acquired wealth could become Tootsee through marriage, synonyms for wealth and power. This gave mobility in identity. During the colonial period these identities were written into law which forbidden these inter-matriages and created a Hutu counter elite groups who could now organise the majority Hutu (85 per cent of the population) against Tootsee (15 per cent of the total). On the other hand, the Tootsee, who are defined as race, not ethnic group, were disprivileged in the civic sphere in relation to the white. So, while the Hutus are demanding Tootsees' overthrowal, the later were calling for independence - overthrow of the white. Both the struggle has a democratic component, and yet, MM says, both cannot be accepted uncritically.

The 1955 revolution brought Hutu counter elite to power. They wanted to cleanse every institutions of Tootsees. The 1972 brought to power another regime who proclaimed cultural revolution over and above the social revolution. After 1994 genocide the Tootsee leadership came to power, who was seeking justice above all. So we have a situation where the Tootsee, the minority, fear democracy. To them, it is a mark for further genocide. On the other, the Hutu, the majority, is afraid of justice which, to them, is a ruse for the minority to retain power over them.

In his "Can Muslim be an Indian" Gyan Pandey (GP) said that we must argue for democratic potential of the nation state and not for nationalism that has demanded cultural homogeneity of communities. No nation, he says, are pure nation. A national is at the same time regional, religious, occupational, etc. with many different identification. In the discourses on the process of nation building during and after partition, G.P. argues, the Muslims have been categorised into two : All Muslims are fundamentally Muslims, but some of them happened to be nationalists who are politically associated with national movement. These discourses never bothered about the political affiliation of Hindus in general. The politically conscious among them were divided into nationalist of right wing variety and secularists nationalists.

One term that appeared frequently in these discourses during the period was the minority. The minorities are called minorities even in places where they are majority, e.g. the Muslims in undivided Bengal or Punjab. The Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists, etc. were considered Indians as the birthplace of their religion (like Hindus) was India. Only the Muslims, to their concern, was foreigners who conquered India, who consistently challenged the Indian national movement for political and other rights and who finally actualised their right in the form of Pakistan.

In all these discourses the Hindus were invisible category : they appeared as 'Hum'. The other invisibility in



these discourses were the politics of the nationhood itself. That it is a political project, involving such issues as federalisation, centralisation, etc. cannot be acknowledged as the concept of nationhood in India, as elsewhere, is always a pure, natural category not political.

The partition time was marked by confusion. The choice of Muslims were determined by the impossibilities of knowing where they belong. The demand was for pure Muslims. They were asked to prove their loyalty politically. On the other hand, the hindus were Indian automatically. They never even used the term in their description. For them this invisibility is the mark of the creation of nationhood. That invisibility needs to be questioned. No nation, GP says, exists naturally, no nation can come to the existence without its politics being worked out, negotiated and fought for. Situations in north-east, in other parts of the country raises this question centrally, fundamentally and absolutely.

In her panel discussion in the last session, U. Kalpagham said that the message of the last two days discussion to her is that the hindu right has definite political project and so far they have been immensely successful to put it through. They have definite ideas of globalisation, market economy, economic configuration, etc. They plan to make individual religious citizen and the corporate sector economic citizen. The other side must take note of these and organise themselves.

The subaltern studies work, she said, have evoked mixed reactions among the social scientists. Some of them have come to relate their work to that of the subaltern studies. But there is a vast body of social scientists who are critical about subaltern studies work. The expectations and tensions have heightened, as a result.

The subaltern studies projects are basically projects of history writings and their critiques have basically from within the historians. Powerful critiques of subaltern studies have, however, come from the political economists. The latter have argued that their (political economists) categories and methods are more rigorously defined than those of subaltern studies like elite and masses etc. But there are subaltern studies scholars like Partha Chatterjee who wanted to integrate mode of production studies with that of the culture and society. But this process of integration remains incomplete.

The main concern of the Indian social science research has been the study of development. The Annual Reports of the ICSSR research institutes have shown this strong commitment to economic and social development. This emphasis on the study of change had resulted in the entrenchment of the empirical positivist approach to all social sciences. The social scientists in this country have not shown much inclination to study power and change. Somehow, she said, the word brings to the mindset of social scientists the



meaning of attempt to divert, or dislodge the older, agreed upon agenda and foster change. The subaltern studies who have so far confined themselves in questioning the dominant historiography, must also begin questioning the dominant social science research more consciously.

The positivist approach to social science, to her thinking, is also linked to the certain instrumentality of bringing about desired change. The dominant opinion among the social scientists have been the statist approach to development with the redistributive concern vested with the state within a democratic secular framework, in which, at some point, the disempowered group will be able to acquire power. This is desirable goal, but, she argued, not a feasible one except in some pockets. Once the power is put at the centre of social science research instead of "development" and is given the social science perspective, the whole social science research would lead to alternative paradigm.

The women studies in India, on the other hand, she thought, kept power and change in focus of their project. The women studies group who have remained deeprooted in political and social movement, have constantly expanded their political. It is, she said, a novel strategy for the movements. To some extent, she thought, the feminist movement in India has moved to the stage of working out for itself theories of knowledge for them, the question of feminist epistemology, issues of political practice, etc. To

this extent, she thinks, the feminist movement in India has reached a higher stage than the subaltern studies work.

The last part of the discussion was confined to the discussion on middle class and nation. Gayatri Spivek argued that the notion that electronification of stock exchange lead to the formation of middle class is a hyper-real, fantasmatic notion. To a descendent of Calcutta-dwelling Bengali Bhadrakalok like her, it is well known that the middle class does not fall from the sky that way.

Whether there was serfdom or slavery in India or not, Javed Alam said, one thing is certain that in India there were certain communities who were unfree. At this particular juncture, he said, it is these communities who are fighting the greatest battle for bourgeois democracy in India. The colonial construction of caste has to a large extent been overcome by these communities. In this context, his concern, he said, is to find out what are the conditions that are standing in the way of forming a radical movement. In the context of globalisation, he said, his other related concern is to find out what are the sites available to us to put up a fight against globalising capital. Javed Alam's assertion is that the nationalist platform against imperialism is one possible site where one can fight against globalisation as well as defend the rights of citizen which the globalisation is attacking. The Indian state, which is after all, the state of the ruling class, will not create this platform. It can be raised only through the united struggles of peasants,

workers and the toiling people. The intellectual can take part in this struggle through their writings and works.

Delineating certain features of current conjuncture in India, Javed Alam pointed that the middle class in India is implicated with the globalisation and have become its spokesmen. Secondly, he said, the contradiction between regional capital and pan-Indian capital, so distinct in the 1960s and 1970s, is no longer there. The regional capital now is as eager as the pan-Indian capital to collaborate with the global capital. Third, he said that there is a disjunction between economics and politics in India at this moment. The formations like OBC etc. he said, have been allowed by the ruling classes (at the centre) to function at the regional level and carry their political projects, social engineering, empowerment, etc. on the condition that they (these formations) do not interfere with the economic policies of the ruling class at the centre. The understanding of this disjunction between economics and politics is very crucial in putting up a fight against the globalisation.

In her discussion, Gayatri Spivek Chakravarti pointed out that the new definition of people's movement coming up in South Asia and South East Asia, i.e. non-governmental organization are discriptions, given by the other side, not definition. The rule of thumb of definition of these peoples movement is that whether their work is substantially

truncated or not when the foreign help is stopped. It is in this context, she said, the global is confronting the local, local rural, which is why the global is also interested in this local rather than the electoral politics though the later is not unimportant and should be fought and won. These nationalist movement (the peoples' movement) were not part of the old nationalist movement. Gayatri Spivek said further that to the extent that there is national movement, we have to think of the nation. But that national movement is dissolved when the networks - the third world network, women network, etc. - combine and that becomes the front for struggle. To this extent, she said, there has taken place displacement of nationalism in the global struggle.

Papers presented in the Conference

Akhlar, J., "Fractured Society and Fractured History - Ayodhya Contribute the Most".

Bhattacharya, S., "Women and the Question of Cultural Rights: Two Cases of North-East India".

Biswas, P., "Debate Between Patriliney and Matriliney in Khasi Society".

Chaudhury, A., "Women and Environment in Ghad Area".

Chatterjee, Partha, A Brief History of Subaltern Studies.

Chatterjee, P., Subjective Paradigm on Hindu-Muslim Identities of Slum Dwellers in Calcutta.

Dhar, H., "Sixth Subaltern Studies : The Changing Theme".

Mohan, S., "Religion, Social Space and Identity : Construction of Boundary in Colonial India".

Mamdani, M., "Citizens, Subjects and Ethnicity".

Mayaram, Sail, "Canonising Hinduism : The Politics of VHP Conversion".

Pandey, G., "Can Muslim be an India".

Shahid Amin, "On Retailing of the Muslim Conquest of India".

Tharu, S., "Citizenship out its Discontent.

Vasudha Group, "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam : The Hindu in the World".